

Attachment

Capability of the Supply Lines for the Viet Cong
and the Effect of Interdiction OperationsI. Summary

North Vietnam in cooperation with the Viet Cong (VC) has considerable capability to infiltrate men and supplies into the Republic of South Vietnam (RVN) by land and by sea. The generally rugged terrain and dense vegetation along the inland border of the RVN conceals an extensive trail network that connects with Communist-controlled roads in Laos. The long northern coast line with many good landing beaches and the extensive network of rivers and canals in the Delta provide an excellent environment and numerous opportunities for infiltration by sea. A large variety of routes can be used, therefore, to infiltrate men and supplies into the RVN.

Infiltration of men takes place principally over the land routes through Laos because groups of men moving over trails are less likely to be detected than if moved by ship. The trail route also has the advantage of adapting the men physically and psychologically to the life as insurgents. Only a few men in groups of three or four, mainly agents and skilled technicians, are known to have been infiltrated by sea.

The principal land routes begin with truck routes in North Vietnam and end in a network of trails crossing into the RVN. Of possibly less importance are trails leading from Cambodia to VC strongholds in the southern part of RVN near the border. The capability of the land routes to deliver materials into South Vietnam depends in the end on the number of porters and animals that the Communists see fit to allocate for this purpose. It is estimated that one reported infiltration system involving about 2300 porters and guards probably delivered about 1 short ton per day (STPD) from the southern part of North Vietnam into Thua Thien Province of the RVN. A recently constructed road (route 92) reduces the length of this porter system, and would permit the same 2,000 men to deliver about 2 STPD throughout the year. Moreover, during the dry season from December 1964 through May 1965, data obtained by the road watch teams on the truck routes in Laos indicate that about 730 tons in addition to the DIA estimated 8,580 tons needed throughout the year by Communist forces in the Panhandle of Laos were moved by truck into that area. Thus, if the DIA estimate of requirements is valid, 730 tons, or about 4 STPD were available for infiltration into the RVN during this period over a second route.

DIA review(s) completed.

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The air strikes against the supply routes in North Vietnam and Laos have created difficulties and have reduced the capacity of and increased the cost of transport. This reduction in capacity, however, did not affect the number of trucks being moved during the recent dry season because the actual average number of trucks moved per day was only about half the estimated post strike capacity of the limiting sectors of the route.

The sea routes have a greater potential for infiltration of supplies than do land routes and have been less affected by air strikes, but we have practically no evidence on the extent to which this potential is being utilized. The large number of native craft that normally operate along the coast of the RVN makes exceedingly difficult the interdiction of the North Vietnam or VC arms carriers.

there may be about 100 native craft allocated to this operation at any one time. If these craft were successfully employed in sea infiltration operations they would have the capability to deliver about 75 STPD daily along the coast of the RVN.

larger craft, including merchant ships, have been used in the past to deliver supplies to the VC. These ships could have delivered large amounts of supplies. In view of the relatively low daily supply requirements of the VC from abroad, however, the actual quantities delivered by these ships are estimated to have been small. With the present increase in naval patrols and the improvement in the surveillance of such craft their contribution to the supply of the VC in the future possibly will not be very large.

In summary, therefore, based on fragmentary intelligence, there appears to be a current capability to infiltrate supplies, as follows: a. by land, 6 STPD during the dry season (about 6 months) and 2 STPD during the rainy season, and b. by sea, about 75 STPD by native craft and a small amount daily -- say no more than 5 STPD -- by ship. Interdiction operations have created difficulties, but have not affected the capabilities of the supply lines.

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II. Overland Supply Lines

A. Introduction

Supplies destined for infiltration to the Viet Cong (VC), as well as supplies for Communist forces in Laos, move by truck from the Vinh area in North Vietnam into Laos. During the dry season most of the trucks move down route 1A to route 15*, follow routes 15 and 12 into Laos through Mu Gia Pass, and proceed south on route 23** to supply dumps located along routes 23 and 9. This route is used from about mid-December through May or June when route 23 can only intermittently be used by trucks. Supplies for forces in the southern tip of the Panhandle of Laos and for infiltration are drawn from these dumps throughout the year and moved by truck east on route 9 to Ban Dong and south on route 92. During the recent dry season route 92 was extended south and east toward the South Vietnamese border. A second route -- the one used to infiltrate men from North to South Vietnam -- also traverses Laos in the movement of some supplies to the South Vietnamese border. This route, which is probably used mostly during the rainy season when route 23 is usually closed to truck traffic, involves truck movements south from Vinh to the area of the Demilitarized Zone near the Laotian border. From there the supplies are portered to Ban Dong along the northern part of route 92 (which in the area consists of a number of trails, some of which are at best jeepable trails in the dry season). At Ban Dong where this route joins the one described above, the supplies can be loaded on trucks again for movement south on route 92. Part of the trail system north of route 9 is paralleled by a river that is navigable for native craft. From the southern part of route 92 supplies are moved further south within Laos by native craft and by men over trails and eventually into South Vietnam by porters on a network of trails. These trails pass through rugged terrain and dense vegetation making them invisible from the air.

B. Capability of Supply Lines

Before the bridges and checkpoints were bombed, the limiting sector of the truckable routes into Laos was route 23, with a dry season capacity of about 400 short tons (or about 130 to 135 trucks carrying 3 tons each) each way per day (EMPD). The dry season capacity throughout

* The number of this route in North Vietnam was formerly called 12 or 15/12.

** In this memorandum the only section of route 23 being discussed is that portion between routes 12 and 9.

the route was reduced by bombing to about 100 tons (30 to 35 trucks) ETPD. The cost of moving this quantity from Vinh would be greatly increased by the necessity of portering or ferrying the supplies 4 times around check-points or across streams, requiring about 1,000 to 1,500 porters at each portage and increasing the percent of the supplies lost by breakage and pilferage. At the present time route 23 probably is not truckable through out on all days, but on some days parts of it probably can be used for truck traffic. During past rainy seasons the road continued to be used to some extent by troops walking and by porters carrying supplies.

The capacity of the second route -- the trail route from near the Demilitarized Zone to Ban Dong on route 9 -- depends to some extent on how many porters are used. Before route 92 was extended and upgraded to a road, this trail network was reported to have been utilized by about 2,000 guards and porters. It is estimated that this system was capable of delivering about 1 short ton per day from near the Demilitarized Zone through Laos into Thua Thien Province of South Vietnam. Now that about one-half of this route is truckable the whole year, it would be possible for the same 2,000 men to deliver 2 ETPD.

C. Requirements for Troops in Laos and Estimated Tonnage Delivered

About 11,800 Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese troops are located in the Panhandle of Laos served by route 23. These forces require logistical support from North Vietnam, presently estimated by DIA to be 21 short tons per day (ETPD) for all classes of supplies. In addition, about 5 ETPD of supplies are required to maintain the supply routes during the dry season. Thus the total supply requirement in the area is 21 ETPD during the rainy season and 26 ETPD during the dry season, making a total annual requirement of nearly 8,580 ETPD per year. The supplies available for infiltration to the VC would be the amount delivered to this area in excess of this requirement.

It is estimated that more than this annual requirement for the Communist forces in Laos was moved by truck down route 23 during the recent dry season. A road watch team located on the northern part of route 23 observed the road on 138 days of the 157 days from 20 December 1964 through 25 May 1965 and reported a level of traffic that was estimated to have been 17 trucks per day moving south (excluding trucks observed to be carrying troops and gear). If it is assumed that each truck carried 3 short tons and that this level of traffic was continued for 6 months,* these trucks could have delivered 9,310 tons. This estimate of

* Observation of the road indicated that traffic moved over it from 20 December 1964 through 25 May 1965 when the road-watch team was forced by enemy action to leave its post. It is assumed that traffic actually continued for at least another 30 days during the rainy season although possibly not on successive days after 25 May.

delivered tonnage is about 730 tons more than the estimated annual requirement for the area. It is possible to conclude, therefore, that 4 STPD during the dry season were probably available in the Panhandle of Laos for infiltration to the VC and an additional amount could have arrived by trails from the southern part of North Vietnam, and that the trail network could easily have had the capacity to deliver this tonnage into South Vietnam. It is believed, however, that only an amount sufficient to supply VC forces along the inland border in the northern provinces would be logically moved by this route at present. Sea infiltration to other areas of South Vietnam probably is much easier and less costly. The trail route is likely maintained mainly to provide a fairly safe route for infiltration of men.

It can also be concluded from the available data that the bombing of the transport routes probably did not affect the actual tonnage delivered into Laos by truck. On the average route 23 was only used at about one-half its post-strike capacity of 30 to 35 trucks per day. During January and February an average of 15 trucks per day were observed going south each month. After the bombing began, an average of 16 trucks per day were observed going south in March, 21 in April, and 14 in May.

D. Land Routes from Cambodia

The VC also obtain supplies, mainly food and small amounts of military supplies, from Cambodia by using porters and smugglers who mingle with normal village traffic to cross the lightly patrolled border. In addition to the water infiltration route along the Mekong River (which is included as part of the next section on supply lines by sea), evidence indicates that trails are used to cross the border principally into Tay Ninh Province, which is for the most part controlled by the VC. Interrogation reports indicate that porters have made regular trips into Cambodia in this area to receive supplies that have been transported by ox cart to the supply point.

The capability of these routes to move military supplies through Cambodia probably has been fairly low, however, probably due to the fact that the Cambodian government has not officially acknowledged involvement with the VC. A large movement would be difficult to conceal, and the present capability is probably less than one ton per day.

III. Supply Lines by Sea

The Republic of South Vietnam (RVN) has about 50,000 craft of all types plying along its 1,500 mile coastline daily, of which the RVN Naval

Patrol has been able to check less than one percent per day. Small craft such as junks and sampans can discharge men and cargo at enormous numbers of locations along the beaches, coves, rivers and canals of South Vietnam. Larger craft including merchant ships can discharge cargo off-shore by the use of small craft as lighters. A major problem involved in the interdiction of infiltration of men and supplies by sea is the strict security discipline maintained by the North Vietnamese and the VC engaged in this operation.

Apart from small numbers of highly trained personnel to be used for espionage or other purposes within the VC organization it is not believed that many personnel have been infiltrated by sea. It is estimated that the bulk of military reinforcements for the VC make their way to South Vietnam over the land infiltration routes.

The ability to condition personnel physically and psychologically for service with the VC during the land infiltration process plays a large part in maintaining this policy. Another factor is that the presence of large numbers of personnel on the sea infiltration craft would present a better target for interdiction by Naval patrols.